

DAVID STEPHEN'S

with monthly guide by
PETER CUNDALL

ORGANIC GROWING CALENDAR

CLIMBING OR RUNNER BEAN IDEAS

Growing runner beans vertically on a trellis of wire netting which encloses the poultry run, provides summer shade for 8 hens on my southern boundary. In May the mass of leaves and stems are removed and shredded for compost. The heating process in a well made compost pile is important to kill overwintering white fly and their eggs which can be seen on the underside of every leaf.

I should mention that runner beans can also be grown without support by dwarfing them. This entails pinching out the growing tips when the plants are 30cm tall, and continuing to pinch out the tips of laterals as they form. Don't let the pods drape on the bare soil - use a mulch of grass underneath.

*Perennial leeks grow from bulbs which must be separated each autumn and transferred to another bed in keeping with good rotation principles. These hardy plants are smaller and milder than conventional leeks, but are always available to eat. Flower stems should be removed as the seed is sterile.

DECEMBER

ENDIVE AS A SALADING

Endive is related to chicory, not lettuce, so to replace lettuce in raw salads, blanching is necessary, as unblanched endive tastes bitter. Put a large flower pot upside-down over it, and cover the drainage holes with masking tape to exclude all light. Another way is to cover the row with hoops of wire to support black plastic sheeting. Blanching takes about three weeks.

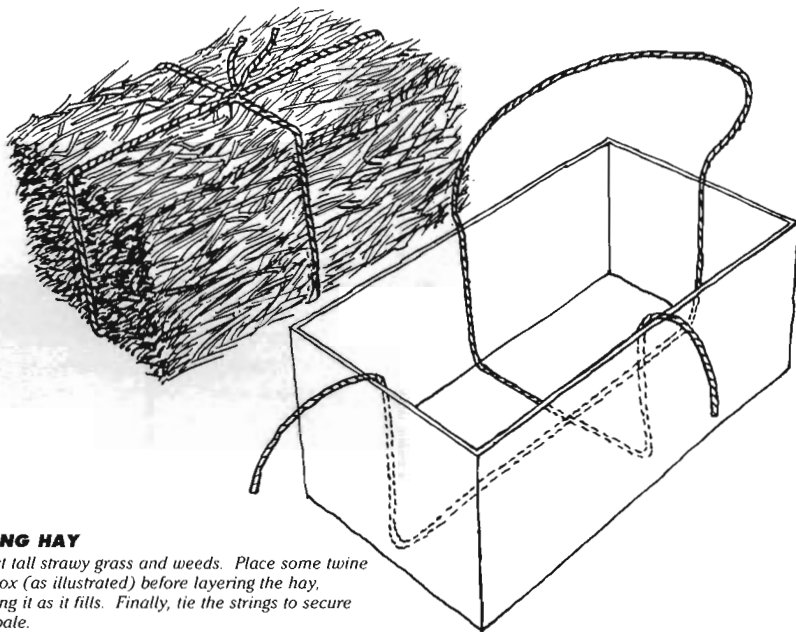
HOW TO ASSESS YOUR MULCH REQUIREMENTS

Normally a wood chip or bark mulch for the ornamental garden is laid down about 10cm thick over bare ground. To calculate how much mulch is needed, multiply the length by the width and divide by 10cm (0.1m). For example, a bed 2 metres wide, 6 metres long requires: 1.2 cubic metres of mulch.

It is almost 20 years now since state and local government bodies joined the ecological revolution by covering roadside and municipal gardens with soil-improving mulches of long lasting wood waste.

SCALE INSECTS

Look for them on gum tree leaves, gardenias, citrus and indoor plants. Scale insects multiply from late summer onwards and seriously weaken plants. Soft scales produce honey dew, which attracts a black sooty mould. They can be suffocated with commercial white oil emulsion, or a home-made equivalent; Mix three teaspoons of cooking oil with half a litre of water in a blender, and spray over the scales. This can be stored, but will need to be blended before using again.



BALING HAY

Collect tall straw grass and weeds. Place some twine in a box (as illustrated) before layering the hay, treading it as it fills. Finally, tie the strings to secure your bale.

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Pear and cherry slugs are easily controlled, but if they are left to damage and strip leaves, the effects are felt for the rest of the summer. Pyrethrum with a dash of Clensel will decimate them this month, just as they are becoming active. A further spraying will be required during January to keep them under control. Another spray of weakened white oil to control codlin moth grub will be needed for trees which have become infested with these pests over a number of years. Stone fruits, especially peach and nectarine, will need plenty of blood and bone, manure or similar organic fertilizer with a high nitrogen content, spread over their roots. Don't forget to water first, then again heavily afterwards.

COMPOST HOLES FOR BUMPER CROPS

For this you will need two grades of good quality garden compost made from nutrient-rich materials.

Break up the soil in a garden bed - spade depth if possible without disturbing the sub-soil. Now dig round or square holes 30-40cm deep, removing about three heaped shovels full of soil. Replace with, first of all, one shovel of semi-mature compost, followed by a mixture of moist sandy loam and mature compost - equal parts.

Firm down, or better still, irrigate and allow up to two weeks for compost to settle. Plant a seedling or sow a seed of the following: tomato, cucumber, zucchini, pumpkin, eggplant, capsicum, asparagus, globe artichoke, or any other gross feeding, heavy yielding plant. Don't forget, drive in a supporting stake for each tomato before planting. If heavy soil surrounding the planted areas is left uncultivated then compost holes will become a sink for excess water and may drown the plants.

FRUIT TREES

Fruit trees grown from stones (peach, plum, nectarine) or pips (orange, lemon, apple) produce vigorous rooted trees which (the text books say) are unlikely to bear crops true to type, if at all. I have personally grown or witnessed countless peach, nectarine, orange, lemon and apple trees grown successfully from seed. One can develop a home orchard at virtually no cost. In the case of a seedling not maturing successfully, it can be easily reworked by budding, or grafting, using wood from a known variety from someone else's garden. Seeds from summer fruits selected for propagation should be placed in the crisper of the fridge in a plastic bag, for at least eight weeks, to break their dormancy. Transfer to a seed bed in early spring.